

Women in Ministry - A Response

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Disclaimer: The following article was written specifically in response to numerous questions we have received regarding an article by Kris Vallotton called '*4 Reasons Why Women Are Oppressed In The Church (And Why It's Not Okay)*'. As such, it is not our intention to provide an exhaustive treatment of this topic. We would point the reader to a number of other resources for a more in-depth study of the issue at hand. One such brilliant, holistic summary of this is '[*What's the Difference? Manhood and Womanhood Defined According To The Bible*](#)'. It is also not our intention to denigrate or judge any person. We do not know Kris Vallotton personally and we are sure he loves God and the church, yet we have a responsibility before the Lord to hold fast to the teachings of Scripture and refute any teaching that is contrary to the Word of God. (Titus 1:9)

Contrasting Kingdoms

With many religious leaders speaking out about the role of women in the Church, it is important to weigh up these claims against Scripture. There are many ways in which the kingdom of God stands in stark contrast to the kingdom of this world. Jesus prophesied that the world would become increasingly wicked before His second coming and we can see this happening in the world today.

As the world becomes more morally corrupted, the value system of the kingdom seems to grow more and more old-fashioned, illogical and even "evil" to many. In our generation, we see many nations (such as the UK and the US) which previously had a widespread Judeo-Christian worldview now abandoning these values in favour of secular-humanistic ones.

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It is not uncommon to find Christians having to defend their values in the face of fierce accusations and intimidation from the world. One of the areas where the contrast in values between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light is most striking is in the area of leadership. Who has

ever heard of a king (other than Jesus) that sacrificed his life for the salvation of his subjects?

It is no surprise then that as leaders in the world grow increasingly self-serving, corrupted and power-hungry, godly leadership should seem more and more foreign. This is not new or surprising, but what *is* surprising is how quickly the Church is being corrupted by worldly values and even criticising age-old kingdom values within the true Church!

Is the Bible Past its Expiration Date?

An example of this kind of criticism can be found in Kris Vallotton's article called *4 Reasons Why Women Are Oppressed In The Church* [\[1\]](#) which we will now take a closer look at and examine in the light of Scripture. He says,

"Many believers have developed a theology that proactively uses the Bible to disqualify women from *the most formidable roles of leadership*, especially in the Church. I am appalled by the number of Christian leaders who are convinced that women are *not as qualified, called, and/or gifted to lead as men*. The argument for *disempowering women* is illogical, unscriptural and beyond *outdated!* I'd like to propose that any stinking thinking that *relegates women to a lower seat of power or authority* is way past its expiration date and it's high time we get with the program that Jesus preached throughout His ministry."

He goes on further to say,

"We have failed to realize that Jesus founded the Women's Liberation Movement. He taught women, spoke to them publicly, protected them from the religious community and *empowered them to minister.*"

Jesus on Women in Leadership

There is an accusation made here that churches that exclude women from certain forms of leadership are thereby 'disempowering women'. But if this is true, what do we say about Jesus? Of the twelve apostles that He chose to establish His kingdom, none of them were women! And yet Jesus had supreme respect and honour for women, giving them dignity and worth that was unusual in that culture.

That Christ did not call women to serve as apostles did not 'disempower' women at all, He had simply called women to glorify God in other ways. This had absolutely nothing to do with their 'qualifications' or their 'giftings'. In fact, most of the men that He chose were very unremarkable with regard to qualifications.

Although Jesus was in an excellent position to overthrow any traditional gender roles which He considered to be 'oppressive', the way in which He chose His leaders affirmed God's instituted social order from creation, beginning with Adam and Eve.

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Worldly Notions of Leadership

Furthermore, when we read language such as that women have been 'relegated' to a 'lower seat of power or authority', we should be alerted to a worldly way of thinking about leadership.

When the mother of Zebedee's sons approached Jesus and said, "*Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom*" (Matthew 20:21), Jesus drew attention to the fact that His disciples should not be grasping for the power and privilege that is associated (wrongly so) with authority. He put it this way,

*"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"* (Matthew 20:25-28, emphasis added)

The disciples had worldly notions of leadership. Jesus knew well that in the kingdom of Satan, people jockey for power, positions of influence and fame. They are motivated by selfish ambition, rivalry and the recognition of men. Jesus both taught and demonstrated to His disciples that leadership is not about privilege and self-serving power, but about sacrifice and love for others.

To suggest further that the age-old, God-assigned order in the kingdom regarding women is 'outdated' is very peculiar indeed. God's definition of righteousness does not change with time, regardless of how the morality of the world changes with each passing fad.

Did Only Paul "Restrict" Women?

Vallotton goes on to say,

"Consider that with 40 authors writing the Bible over a period of 1,450 years in several countries and multiple cultures, in various situations and in the Old and New Covenant, only one man seems to restrict women from leadership and teaching — the great apostle Paul."

He says further,

"If God wanted to restrict half the population from leading or teaching men (kind of a big deal, I think), then why are 39 authors virtually silent on the issue, while Paul seems specifically to restrict women? And once more, why does Paul write to nine different churches or church leaders, but only restrict women in three locations? Why does Paul empower women in some places and limit them in others? I'd like to propose that the cultural context of the letters which restrict women is the key to understanding Paul's instructions."

Let us weigh this statement up against the testimony of Scripture. Is it true that only Paul 'restricts women in leadership and teaching'? Far from it! In both the Old and New Testaments, we find overwhelming evidence pointing to the fact that in God's kingdom, leadership in the Church is a male responsibility:

In the Old Testament:

- The patriarchs were all men
- All God's covenant representatives were male (e.g. Adam, Noah, Abraham)

- Priests in God's temple were men
- The judges God called to deliver Israel were male, with the exception of Deborah
 - It is interesting that Deborah is the 'exception that proves the rule', as she herself acknowledged that it was the lack of courage on the part of the rightful (male) leader, that brought her into prominence (Judges 4:9)
- God appointed kings to lead Israel

In the New Testament:

- God sent His Son to teach us the way of truth
- The twelve apostles were all males
- The Seventy who Jesus sent out were all males
- The synagogue leaders and teachers were men
- Elders appointed in the first churches were men
- Paul taught explicitly that Eldership (as those responsible for governance in the Church i.e. doctrine, direction and discipline) is male (1 Timothy 3:1-5, Titus 1:6,9)

Back to Adam & Eve

So, is it true that it was the cultural context of Paul's letters that restricted women from being elders in the Church? Let us look at the reasons Paul himself gives for the restrictions in 1 Timothy 2:11-14,

"A woman must learn in quietness and full submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman who was deceived and fell into transgression."

The reason Paul gives for the restriction was not the context of the church where Timothy was situated, rather he references Adam and Eve in the garden and God's own creation ordinance.

Vallotton goes on in his article to say,

"One of the curses over women in the book of Genesis was increased pain during childbirth, but the verse that had the greatest negative impact on womanhood was God's proclamation that their husbands would rule over them. The Hebrew word for "rule" is mashal, which means "to have dominion." It is imperative for us to realize that before the curse, husbands and wives were commissioned to co-reign together (see Genesis 1:27-28). It was only after the curse that husbands were given dominion over their wives".

He says further,

"When Jesus gave His life up on the cross, He became sin for us and thus destroyed the curse that was propagated against us (including the curse that caused husbands to rule wives) in the Garden of Eden."

So, is it true that God only made Adam the head of their marriage after the curse? Before we look at the text, it is worth noting that the attitude toward leadership in this article assumes that submission to godly leadership is always a bad, oppressive thing.

It is granted that due to our fallen, prideful, rebellious nature we do often struggle to submit to leadership, whether it be to God himself or those whom God sets over us, but this is not because

submitting ourselves to authority is intrinsically evil. A part of God's redemptive work in us is to restore us to humility where we are able to celebrate and joyfully submit ourselves to godly leadership.

Adam and Eve had different but complementary roles in their marriage prior to the fall, which was not odious or 'oppressive' in any way.

Different But Complementary Roles

But let us have a look at the story of the fall in the Garden of Eden:

a.) The first evidence that Adam was made the leader in the marriage prior to the fall, was that he was created first (Genesis 2:7) and he was instructed by God regarding covenant faithfulness before Eve was created (Genesis 2:15-17). God gave Adam the responsibility of leading Eve in righteousness.

This is affirmed by the fact that, although Eve sinned first, God held Adam responsible for the sin that they both committed (Romans 5). In fact, after the fall God rebukes Adam, because *"you have listened to the voice of your wife"* (Genesis 3:17). This implies not only 'listening to' but 'obeying' his wife, which was a reversal of the roles God had given them.

Being the firstborn in Hebrew culture conferred leadership and authority, as it did with Adam. We saw this referenced earlier in Paul's argument in 1 Timothy 2:13, *"For Adam was formed first, and then Eve."* This is also frequently mentioned regarding Jesus as the 'first-born', which confers authority onto Him over all who are born-again after Him.

b.) When God creates Eve, He designates her role not as 'co-leader' but as Adam's 'helper' (Genesis 2:18). As a consequence of our fallen, prideful natures, we may consider this role to be inferior or demeaning, but God Himself does not shy away from giving us His Spirit to 'help' us. The Spirit's role as 'helper' in no way makes Him inferior to the Father, He simply performs a different function.

c.) In Hebrew culture, it is also significant that Adam was given the task of naming Eve (Genesis 2:23). This also indicated authority.

Considering this evidence, it becomes clear that Adam and Eve had different but complementary roles in their marriage prior to the fall, which was not odious or 'oppressive' in any way.

If we look at the nature of the curse spoken to Eve in Genesis 3:16, Bible scholar John Piper suggests that both the language and the context of Genesis suggests that Eve *"will be corrupted by an unnatural inclination to usurp the God-appointed place of a man as her leader."* [2] We see this interpretation supported in several translations of this text. For example, in the ESV, *"Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."* It is put even more explicitly in the NLT, *"And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you."*

So, in contrast to Vallotton's argument, we find that male leadership was not a result of the curse, but rather the curse resulted in women having to constantly fight the tendency to resent male leadership and even usurp it.

Taking Leadership Cues from The World

Later, Vallotton says,

“The fact is that in the last hundred years, *many countries of the world have begun to champion women*, giving them places of leadership in politics, in business, in education, and in almost every realm of society, while much of the Body of Christ won’t even allow them to be elders in a church of fifty people.”

This quotation is insightful in what it reveals about his understanding of the relations between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Did Jesus teach us that we should take our cue from the world? Hasn’t the kingdom pattern for leadership always looked rather different to the world’s?

What has the fruit been in anything that the secular humanistic agenda has promoted and changed in societal relations? What has the fruit been in marriages, in our children, in our schools, in our societies as the Judeo-Christian value system has been eroded and replaced?

Do we really want to take our cue from the world with regards to leadership and gender roles? Definitely not!

Leadership is not a ‘promotion’, but a position of humility and service.

Leadership vs. Domination

We will wrap up our discussion with a few quotations that reveal Vallotton’s perception of authority,

“What makes us think that men were set free from the curse of the Law at the cross, but that women should still be under the curse *that allows husbands to dominate them in the name of God?*”

“Many men are insecure; *reducing women helps them feel more powerful.*”

“Men often mistake these attributes for weakness and believe women are not as qualified to lead. *This results in women being promoted less frequently than men, or men purposely oppressing women.*”

It is difficult to read these words and not conclude that Vallotton’s perception of leadership and authority have been profoundly influenced by the worldly notions that Jesus warned us against in Matthew 20:25-28 (quoted earlier). Godly leadership does not ‘dominate’. It is not about ‘power’ or stepping on the heads of others for *self-promotion*. Leadership is not a ‘promotion’, but a position of humility and service.

Vallotton’s view of leadership would seem to suggest that unless you are in some form of significant leadership within the Church, you are not empowered to contribute to the advancement of the kingdom in any meaningful way. But the purpose of leadership is supposed to be “*to equip the saints for the work of ministry*” (Ephesians 4:12, emphasis added), not for self-promotion or to do all the ministry themselves.

Is Jesus Oppressed?

We need to go further than this and ask the question, according to Vallotton, 'Is Jesus oppressed?' Consider this verse,

*"But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and **the head of Christ is God.**"* (1 Corinthians 11:3)

If male leadership is regarded as evil and oppressive, what of Christ? Is He oppressed by God the Father? No! God has ordered His kingdom according to His own wisdom. Godly leadership is wonderful and to be affirmed and celebrated. It is important to acknowledge that calling male leadership in the church 'oppressive' is to call into question God's own wisdom in how He has chosen to order His kingdom.

As those who have repented of our rebellion against God and submitted ourselves joyfully to His leadership and His ordering of authority in the world, we need to stay alert to Satan's ploys to lead us after his ways by appealing to our sinful nature. More than this, we need to be champions of the wisdom of God's ways, even in the face of intimidation and scorn from a world that is growing darker and more confused.

References:

- [1] <https://www.krisvallotton.com/4-reasons-women-oppressed-church-not-okay>
- [2] <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/satans-design-in-reversing-male-leadership-role>